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SUBJECT: NUR MISUARI ATTENDS TENTH ANNIVERSARY CEREMONY OF
1996 GRP-MNLF PEACE AGREEMENT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Paul W. Jones
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Moro National Liberation Front Chairman Nur Misuari criticized the GRP for failing to implement fully the provisions of the 1996 peace agreement during a September 2 commemoration ceremony in Davao to mark the signing of the accord. To "resuscitate" the ten year old agreement, Misuari called for a tripartite meeting between the GRP, MNLF, and Organization of the Islamic Conference in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Though former President Ramos endorsed the need for a tripartite meeting with Misuari as one of the participants, the GRP has yet to decide how to deal with the charismatic Misuari who awaits trial on rebellion charges. END SUMMARY.

Misuari Furloughed to Commemoration

¶2. (SBU) A commemoration ceremony in Davao City, Mindanao, on September 2 marking the 10th anniversary of the signing of the 1996 peace agreement between the GRP and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) featured speeches by the accord's two principal signatories: former President Fidel Ramos and MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari. Also in attendance were Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, and National Security Advisor Noberto Gonzales. To facilitate Misuari's attendance, the Manila Makati Court granted him an 18-hour furlough from house arrest. Though Misuari has been incarcerated since late 2001 on rebellion charges, he remains the true leader of the MNLF in the eyes of large segments of the Philippines' Muslim community.

"Ill-Fated" Peace Agreement

¶4. (SBU) In his remarks to a standing room only crowd of an estimated 500 supporters, Misuari said the 1996 agreement was "ill-fated," and criticized the GRP for failing to implement fully its provisions. As he banged his fist on the rostrum, Misuari said, "We will not allow you to impose peace on Mindanao. If you want peace in Mindanao, respect our rights to play our role. You don't impose peace on us. We will reject that." As his supporters waved yellow posters bearing the words "Free Nur Misuari Now," Misuari commented that "If you want peace, let the people of Mindanao - Christians, highlanders, and Muslims - come together and spearhead the making of peace here. No law can solve this problem. Only

the people of Mindanao with the cooperation of the government in Manila can bring genuine, permanent, lasting peace to this war-torn homeland of ours." To "resuscitate" the agreement, Misuari called for a tripartite meeting between the GRP, MNLF, and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia with himself representing the MNLF at these talks.

Ramos Underscores Successes of Agreement,
but Admits Need for Review

¶5. (SBU) In thoughtful and conciliatory remarks, former President Ramos underscored the successful integration of former MNLF members into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police while acknowledging shortfalls in the full implementation of the 1996 peace agreement. He also noted the substantial role played by the U.S. Government in supporting peace and development in Mindanao through USAID programs and joint military cooperation.

¶6. (SBU) In a crowd pleasing gesture, Ramos compared Misuari to the Filipino hero, Jose Rizal, and reminded the audience -- which was clearly agitated and electrified by Misuari's speech -- of Rizal's urging that Filipinos eschew violence as a means of redressing grievances. At the end of his remarks, Ramos endorsed the need for a tripartite meeting between the GRP, MNLF, and OIC in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and the participation of Misuari in these talks.

GRP At A Crossroads

¶7. (C) National Security Advisor Gonzales, who attended the September 2 ceremony in Davao, later told Charge that the GRP knew it was taking a risk in allowing Misuari to attend. "We're at a crossroads in how to deal with him," Gonzales said.

¶8. (C) Gonzales noted that Misuari was looking forward to the possibility of traveling to Jeddah in November, but said much would depend on Misuari's actions beforehand. He stated that the GRP would not engage in any renegotiation of the 1996 peace accord, but was open to a review of its provisions, many of which had not been implemented. One key issue for the GRP would be demobilization and disarmament of MNLF forces. Gonzales stressed, however, that a review could only occur once the MNLF's internal leadership problems were settled, yet Misuari had refused to meet with the MNLF Council of 15. With leadership of the MNLF still divided, Gonzales said it was still not possible to reconcile differences between the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front -- a prerequisite for lasting peace in Mindanao.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Misuari's visit to Davao appears to have been a test by the GRP to see how this Muslim leader would frame his public comments and be received by his supporters. Our sense is that the results are inconclusive, and more negotiating will be required before the GRP finally decides how to handle Misuari.

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